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SUBJECT: COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES COMPLETES ANNUAL SESSION

¶1. Summary. On September 12, 2008, the Committee on Conferences (CoC), the intergovernmental body mandated to make recommendations to the General Assembly (GA) on all matters related to UN conference servicing, reached consensus on a resolution containing recommendations for the consideration of the Fifth Committee under its agenda item on Pattern of Conferences. The annual CoC session, which lasted five days from September 8 to 12, was generally cordial and productive but with some contentious discussions.

¶2. The CoC recommended adoption of the draft calendar of conferences and meetings for 2009, which is available at www.un.org/events, and reached agreement on a number of topics including the integrated global management initiative (see para. 3 below), equal use of the six official UN languages (para. 4), use of temporary assistance staff in language services (para. 5), funding of vacancies and recruitment of language staff especially for the UN Offices at Nairobi (UNON) and Geneva (UNOG) (paras. 6 and 7 respectively), impact of the Capital Master Plan (CMP) on conference servicing (para. 8), implementation of the Secretary-General's "Cool UN" initiative (paras. 9 and 10), late-issuance of documents (para. 11), raising the ceiling on earnings of retired UN language staff (para. 12) and raising the retirement age of language staff (para. 13). During negotiations, USDel, working closely with the Austrian Vice-Chair of the CoC, was able to minimize or eliminate objectionable proposals. End Summary.

¶3. Integrated global management: The CoC maintained previous resolution language which approves of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management's (DGACM) work towards streamlining conference servicing procedures. A new paragraph of the draft resolution was added requesting SYG Ban to include information on financial savings resulting from the integrated global management system in his next report.

¶4. Equality among the six official UN languages: The French delegation at every opportunity emphasized the equal use of all six official UN languages. The CoC did not adopt language that could imply an increase in funds for translation and interpretation services.

¶5. Use of temporary assistance staff in language services: The Russian delegation was insistent that the draft resolution include a paragraph explicitly endorsing the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) report (A/63/96) on the "existing special arrangements governing the recruitment of temporary assistance staff in the language services across the four main duty stations." The members of the CoC agreed to follow past practice and to "take note" of the recommendations in the report and to ask the SYG to report on their implementation.

¶6. Vacancies of language staff in the UN Office at Nairobi (UNON): The CoC did not adopt proposals introduced by the Kenyan delegation that would have raised the grade levels of language posts and decided that all translator and reviser posts should be funded under the regular budget.

¶17. Vacancies of language staff in the UN Office in Geneva (UNOG): The French delegation proposed language to address the increase in conference servicing requirements arising out of meetings of the Human Rights Council (HRC). The committee agreed to call on the SYG to take action to address this problem while avoiding any immediate financial implications.

¶18. Impact of the CMP on conference servicing: The CoC agreed that the Secretariat should limit any negative impact on the quality of conference services provided to Member States during the construction period. Although most members of the CoC were in favor of retaining the language from last year's CoC resolution, the Russian delegation proposed amendments that would have emphasized the importance of all conference servicing requirements being met throughout the CMP process rather than previously adopted language calling on Member States to show flexibility during the construction process. The committee succeeded in adopting balanced language.

¶19. Impact of the "Cool UN" initiative on Member States: The Russian delegation, in the view of USDel and other delegations in the CoC, attempted to include provisions on SYG Ban's "Cool UN" initiative in the CoC's report to diminish Ban's authority as the Chief Administrative Officer of the Organization under article 99 of the UN Charter.

¶10. Ban's "Cool UN" initiative on climate change raised temperatures by a few degrees at Headquarters during the summer to decrease the UN's CO2 emissions. The Russian delegation proposed the following new language: "Requests at the same time that the initiatives of the Secretary-General which imply changes in the working conditions of delegates of

the Member States are to be properly discussed and decided upon in the appropriate intergovernmental bodies, namely in the Committee on Conferences and in the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly." After several other formulations were rejected, the CoC Chairman presented and the CoC adopted the following general language: "Requests the Secretary-General to consult Member States on initiatives that affect the utilization of conference services and conference facilities."

¶11. Late issuance of documents: Several delegations, including Russia, Belarus, and Syria, presented language that would have required the SYG to impose "sanctions" against senior officials in author departments that submit documents late. USDel objected to this impractical proposal. The CoC agreed to recognize the efforts underway to address the problem, including reconvening the already established Secretariat task force, and asked the SYG to submit an interim report to the second resumed session of the 63rd GA in May 2009 on the status of peacekeeping financing documentation - the session is usually devoted to consideration of the budgets of peacekeeping operations - and to issue a comprehensive report to the 64th GA through the CoC.

¶12. Ceiling of earnings for retired language staff: Due to the difficulty of filling language staff vacancies at the four duty stations, the Syrian delegation proposed raising the ceiling on UN earnings of UN language staff retirees to increase their availability for "emergency" short-term contracts. During negotiations, it became clear that DGACM and the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) did not agree on the level of earnings authorized under GA resolution 57/305. Syria subsequently withdrew its language and the committee called on the SYG to clarify the meaning of "workdays" in resolution 57/305 and, in turn, the level of earnings authorized for retired UN language staff.

¶13. Raising the retirement age of language staff: The Syrian delegation also proposed language that would have raised the retirement age of language staff. After USDel, Austria, and others asserted that this issue should be addressed in its proper context under the human resources item in the Fifth Committee, Syria withdrew its language. Khalilzad